

Growing Vice of Online Gambling

Now that the World Cup is over, casual football gamblers may take a back seat from throwing some money at games for a while – and that’s no bad thing.

The World Cup, and the English Premier League in recent years, has brought many young people into the betting arena for the first time, a potentially retrograde development.

With that in mind, the European Commission has recently adopted a Recommendation on online gambling services.

It encourages Member States to pursue a high level of protection for consumers, players and minors through the adoption of principles for online gambling services and for responsible advertising and sponsorship of those services.

The report reads: “The aims of the principles are to safeguard health and to minimise the eventual economic harm that may result from compulsive or excessive gambling.”

The Commission’s Recommendation sets out a number of principles that Member States are invited to take up in their gambling regulations.

These include: “Basic information requirements for gambling websites, in particular to ensure that consumers are provided with sufficient information to understand the risks related to gambling.

“Commercial communication (advertising and sponsorship) should be carried out in a responsible way.

“Member States should ensure that minors are not able to gamble online, and that rules are in place to minimise their contact with gambling, including through advertising or promotion of gambling services whether broadcast or displayed.

“Advertising and sponsorship of online gambling services should be more socially responsible and transparent.

“There should be a registration process to open a player account so that consumers have to provide details of age and identity for verification by the operators. This should also enable operators to keep track of player behaviour and raise the alarm if necessary.

“Ongoing support should be available to players to prevent gambling-related problems, by equipping them with tools to keep gambling under control: with spending limits on gambling.

“Players should have access to help lines they can call for assistance about their gambling behaviour, and they should be able to easily exclude themselves from gambling websites.”

In Australia, we know that TV ads run regularly promoting the reduction of gambling. It has become a vice, and for some an addiction, leading some to lose their homes, savings and, in some cases, their marriages.

According to the new Commission recommendations, Ireland will be asked to carry out awareness-raising campaigns about gambling and related risks, as well as to collect data about the opening and closing of player accounts and breaches of commercial communication rules.

Such a development is not before time in our view.

The fast-paced progress of online technology, with the development of mobile phones and smartphones, tablets and digital TV, goes hand-in-hand with an increase in the offer and use of online gambling services in Europe.

Seven million EU consumers participating in online gambling services – 45 per cent of the world market share.

As the English football season draws closer, and bear in mind too the growth of betting on Gaelic Games, the Government must take some action in this area before we start talking about gambling in a similar vein to alcoholism.